

SUBJECT: Providing greater access to certain academic records; authorizing a fee

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 10 ayes — Murphy, Pacheco, Cortez, Frullo, P. King, Muñoz, Ortega, Parker, Raney, J. Turner

0 nays

1 absent — C. Turner

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Molly Weiner, United Ways of Texas)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Priscilla Camacho, Alamo Colleges District)

BACKGROUND: Concerns have been raised that students who leave a Texas college, university, or career school before completing their degree and with an outstanding debt to the institution are denied access to their official transcripts. The inability to submit transcripts can limit their ability to apply for a job or resume their education, further limiting their ability to repay their student loans.

DIGEST: CSHB 237 would require a postsecondary educational institution to release a student's transcript or certificate of completion of training, as applicable, with certain exceptions.

On request by a student who had not fulfilled the student's financial obligation to an institution, a postsecondary educational institution would be required to release the student's transcript or certificate of completion of training issued by the postsecondary institution, as applicable, only if the student:

- had not been enrolled in the institution for at least five years;
- included with the student's request a copy of the posting for the job for which the student intended to apply or a statement that the student intended to enroll in another institution; and
- had made a good faith effort to fulfill their financial obligation to the institution, such as by entering into a payment plan with the institution.

A transcript or certificate of completion of training released on request to a student in debt to the postsecondary institution would be issued directly to the employer or institution for which the student was requesting the documentation.

Fees. A postsecondary institution would be authorized to charge a reasonable fee to release the transcript or certificate of completion of training. The amount of the fee would have to be the same for each student, but an institution could establish a policy that charged a lower fee for certain students based on criteria other than whether the student had paid their debt to the institution.

Other provisions. The bill would remove language in the Education Code specifying that a person who was liable to a public institution of higher education for unpaid nonresident tuition due to an erroneous residency classification was not entitled to receive an official transcript that included credit for courses taken while the person was misclassified.

The bill would repeal provisions that allow a career school or college to withhold a student's transcript or certificate until the student's financial obligation to the school or college has been fulfilled.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2021.